

DATA LINE



Published by Santa Clarita Valley PC Group ... We're User Friendly
Serving the Santa Clarita Valley, CA since 1988

Volume XXIX, Issue 4
Editor: Judy Taylour

Meetings
SCV Senior Center
22900 Market Street
Newhall CA 91321
www.scvpcg.org

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The Beginners Corner

What Do You Use to Frame Your Digital Images

By Fran Damratowski, Refurbishing SIG Chair, Chesapeake PC Users Group, MD
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When using a 35mm camera photos are framed using a viewfinder. One of two basic types of viewfinders is used. One type used by single lens reflex (SLR) cameras is a through the lens (TTL) optical viewfinder. The SLR TTL viewfinders use a mirror and pentaprism or porro finder to reflect the light/image directly through the lens to the viewfinder without changing the light/image (what you see is what you get). The second types are optical viewfinders that do not project the actual image directly to the viewfinder. They are (1) rangefinders that use the principle of triangulation and mirrors and (2) optical tunnel viewfinders that consist of a tunnel that goes from a small lens, near the photographic lens, and the viewfinder. The problem with the optical viewfinders is parallax error. What you see is not exactly you get because the complete image does not come through the camera lens to the viewfinder. What you see is actually less than what you get.

Digital cameras have several different types of viewfinders, optical tunnel viewfinders as described above and TTL viewfinders. There are three types of TTLs liquid crystal displays (LCDs) that are located on the camera, Electronic Viewfinders (EVF), and the mirror and pentaprism or porro finder that are used in digital single lens reflex (DSLR) cameras.

An LCD panel is essentially a small TV built into the digital camera. The camera has a lens that admits light to an image sensor that converts it to data. The data is then sent to a mini computer in the camera that sends the data as an image to the LCD panel. The LCD panel is as active as a TV screen and changes as the image in front of the lens changes. What you see is what you get when you click the shutter button.

An EVF is basically an LCD panel, about 0.5 inches diagonally, located behind the small viewfinder on the back of the camera. The image that is seen through this eye level viewfinder is exactly what is seen on the LCD panel and will be captured when the shutter button is clicked.

DSLR cameras use the same the mirror and pentaprism or porro finder that are used in 35 mm SLR cameras. Very few of DSLRs use an LCD panel to frame the photo. The LCD panel in most DSLR cameras is used to view the image after it has been captured to the memory card.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the various types of viewfinders

Because LCD panels are TTL viewfinders they have the advantage of showing about 100% of the image that will be captured when the shutter button is clicked. There is no parallax error. You can immediately see the effects of zooming in on your subject. It is excellent for accurate framing. If you use an extension or a filter on the camera lens you will see the effect of the extension or filter. You can view the images and immediately delete those you don't want to keep. You can also view the camera settings if you desire. The LCD panel works well in dim light.

One of the major disadvantages is that they generally perform poorly in some situations such as

when reflections and glare are present and in bright sunlight. The image is also difficult to see on monitor in some dark situations because the human eye can see about twice the light the LCD portrays. Some of these problems can be corrected with antireflective coatings, trans-reflective technology that increases brightness provides better contrast, and wider viewing angles.

Some LCD panels are better than others. Larger LCD panels are easier to see than smaller LCD panels, but to place a 2.5 or 3-inch LCD panel on a camera you must have a large camera or give up the option of an EVF or optical viewfinder. Digicams without an EVF or optical viewfinder are less expensive to manufacture. LCD panels are made up of pixels. Poor quality LCD panels will have fewer pixels and may have a lot of digital noise (bad pixels). A better LCD panel will have more pixels, but it will use more power. See the manufacturers specifications for the number of pixels on the LCD panel.

LCD panels use backlighting consequently they use a lot of power. If the LCD panel is left on for a long period of time it will drain the battery very quickly. This in turn translates into lost pictures because there is no power or additional cost for extra batteries.

Most Digicams have the LCD panel located on the back of the camera integrated into the camera body. The first consumer digicam with an LCD panel was the Casio QV-10 released in 1995. This camera had an articulating body. Cameras with articulating bodies and articulating screens are still being manufactured today. With these cameras pictures can be taken from any angle such as overhead, out a window, pointing the camera at the subject but looking in another direction.



Casio QV10



Nikon Coolpix 4800

The main advantage to a digicam with an EVF is that it is TTL focusing there is no parallax error when looking through the viewfinder. What you see is what you get. An EVF or optical tunnel viewfinder is a necessity if the LCD panel fades out in the sun or the battery power is low. If the digicam has a zoom power over 5X the EVF is the only eyelevel viewfinder available. The tunnel optical viewfinder is not an option.



Canon PowerShot S3is

The disadvantages of an EVF consist of slower reaction to changing views, the resolution is lower than an optical viewfinder, because it has an LCD it uses battery power, and it freezes between shots with rapid sequential shooting.

The old optical tunnel viewfinder has several advantages the first is that it always works, it uses no power and, light goes directly through the camera without changing just like the optical TTL viewfinder in an SLR. The optical tunnel viewfinder is ideal for someone who likes to hold the camera to the eye to shoot a picture.

Because the optical tunnel viewfinder does not use the photographic lens about 85% of the image is not seen, parallax error, as a matter of fact the closer to the subject the greater the variance from the photographic lens. The optical tunnel viewfinder should not be used when shooting a picture of the sun because there is nothing to protect the eye.

The optical tunnel viewfinder and EVF are omitted from many cameras because the cameras can be smaller and it is less expensive to manufacture them.

The future

An LCD panel is made up of a white backlight that changes color as it passes through a crystalline material. It is the power hungry backlight that depletes the battery power. A new type of panel being investigated is the organic light emitting diode (OLED). The OLED is carbon based as opposed to the crystalline material used by the LCD. The carbon-based molecules can be sprayed on any material and do not require a backlight that makes OLEDs more power efficient, brighter, and with a wider angle of view. From a marketing standpoint an OLED is less complicated and less expensive to manufacture.

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TV Choices Today

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A few weeks ago, I sat down to watch Ugly Betty, my favorite television show, but our trusty old television set wasn't cooperating. I was presented with a blank screen. We soon found that the old set wasn't worth repairing, so the decision was easy. We would simply buy a new one. Of course, it would be one of the new high definition televisions. We thought we would just run out and buy one, but we quickly found that buying a TV today is nothing like it was a few years ago.

It used to be easy to buy a new TV. You simply chose a reliable manufacturer and purchased the size of television that your budget would allow. Now, to purchase a new TV you have to choose from a growing list of manufacturers, you have to decide between competing technologies like CRT, LCD, Plasma, DLP, and LCoS. You have to understand refresh rates, burn-in, resolutions, and complex terminology like 720i and 1080p. Oh, and even though prices have plummeted lately, you still have to have a fairly large amount budgeted for the purchase.

Since I am a fanatic about high tech equipment, I lunged into research mode. Like other high tech areas, the world of the television is constantly changing, but here is what I found about the current state of the competing television technologies.

First, there is the old fashioned CRT (Cathode Ray Tube). Although this is dying breed, they are still manufacturing these and they are comparatively inexpensive. The biggest disadvantage of this type of television is the large size and weight of the TV. CRTs are also prone to geometric distortion, uneven light output, areas of mis-focus, and distortion by magnetic fields. In short, while they are fairly cheap, the picture quality can't compare to the other new technologies.

A newer technology, dubbed DLP (Digital Light Processing), is grabbing a good portion of the market. While more expensive than a CRT, these sets are somewhat cheaper than the flat panel LCD and plasma displays. While smaller and lighter than CRTs, the DLPs have a good sized hump in the back so they cannot be hung on a wall like the flat panel displays. DLPs are known for outstanding brightness, good contrast, and good black levels. They are also known for smooth motion and are well-suited to fast moving video like sports. Older DLP TVs had a slight rainbow effect where you could see colors separate on the screen, but the latest TVs of this type have pretty much eliminated this problem. The downside to DLP TVs is that you can currently expect to have to replace the bulb in three to four years. Manufacturers are working to extend the bulb life, and as new models are introduced, this may become less of a problem. The upside to this is that DLPs maintain their full level of brightness until the bulb dies, while most other new types of television like LCD and Plasma will get dimmer with age.

A few years ago, I would not have recommended a plasma TV, but they have made great strides in perfecting this technology. Plasmas have traditionally been the largest screens, but as larger and larger LCD are produced, the plasmas have almost lost their edge in the size category. Plasmas have the highest contrast levels and the truest blacks, so they often show a very realistic picture. However, plasmas are best viewed in a dark room and they do not do as well in a brightly lit room. While burn-in, where a static image would become etched into the screen, has been almost eliminated, if you constantly watch a channel with a logo or a static scroll bar on the bottom, it would still be best to stay away from plasma. Also plasma TVs are more fragile so you will want to consider professional delivery and setup, especially if you purchase a large unit and will be hanging it on a wall. Plasmas are perfectly suited to an in-home theatre atmosphere and are great for watching movies.

LCD (Liquid Crystal Displays) have been used for years as computer monitors and are now very popular as television screens. Like plasmas, they are flat panels that can be hung on the wall. LCDs produce brighter pictures making them more suitable for brightly lit rooms. They produce vibrant, lifelike colors, but blacks are not as saturated as with plasmas. When choosing an LCD, remember that the lower the response time, the better the picture. (Aim at a response time of 8MS or less.) Their biggest drawback in the past has been a reduction in the viewability as you moved to the side of the television. Many manufacturers have greatly improved the viewing angles of their televisions but some LCD screens are still not as clear or color-rich when viewed from the side.

One last technology is a new one called LCoS (Liquid Crystal on Silicon) which is like a hybrid that uses the liquid crystal technology from the LCD system and the reflective mirror technology that is used in DLP TVs. LCoS TVs show a high resolution and smooth picture. They are projection-type televisions like DLP, so they are bulkier than the flat panel TVs. While there are not many LCoS televisions available right now, they may become are technology to watch in the future.

There are enough choices in television technologies to boggle even the most astute mind. When you are ready for a new television, you will want to use the Internet for even more information. You may also find that your local appliance or electronic store has some knowledgeable people whose expertise you will find valuable. Look around your local area to find your television experts.

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The Lighter Side

There was once a young man who, in his youth, professed his desire to become a great writer. When asked to define "Great" he said, "I want to write stuff that the whole world will read., stuff that people will react to on a truly emotional level, stuff that will make them scream, cry, howl in pain and anger!"



He now works for Microsoft writing error messages.

"You see, wire telegraph is a kind of a very, very long cat. You pull his tail in New York and his head is meowing in Los Angeles. Do you understand this? And radio operates exactly the same way: you send signals here, they receive them there. The only difference is that there is no cat." –Albert Einstein (when asked to describe radio).

A buddy of mine works in an office where a computer going down causes quite an inconvenience. Recently, one of the computers not only crashed, it made a noise that sounded like a heart monitor. "This computer has flat-lined!" a co-worker called out with mock horror. "Does anyone here know how to do mouse-to-mouse?"

From the Rochester Computer Society, Inc. *Monitor*, April 2007



VistaVexes

The Windows Vista Pains'n'gains Page

by Jan Fagerholm, Assistant Editor, PC Community, Hayward, California

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Windows Vista is Microsoft's next-gen operating system. But does it provide next-gen performance? After weeks of use, I finally decided to benchmark Vista against Windows XP.

Methodology is important in comparisons like this, so I decided to run the benchmarks on a system where I have Windows Vista and Windows XP installed on a dual boot setup. This way, the hardware

is the same for both Oss.

The system consists of an ASUS M2 motherboard with an AMD Athlon X2 4200+ dual core CPU and 1 GB of memory that I've been setting up for a client. Other particulars include an ATI Radeon X600 PCI-X graphics card and a single 300 GB SATA-2 hard drive.

The software used was PageMark Software's PerformanceTest. I haven't tried it for a while, and the PerformanceTest software can be downloaded and used free for 30 days. I like to use benchmarks for burning in new machines; the tests can take several hours, and they use the system's components exhaustively.

Overall, the PageMark rating for Vista was 391.3 against XP's 468.3 (higher numbers are better). This is a 19.7% negative hit for running Vista versus running XP. Windows XP bests Vista on 18 out of the 24 tests in PageMark's suite. Where's the performance going?

First, Vista matches XP in performance in several important areas, but "matches" is the operative description. Vista keeps up in CPU string sort operations (used for indexing), 2D graphics shapes (think pie charts and the like) memory writes, and hard disk seeks.

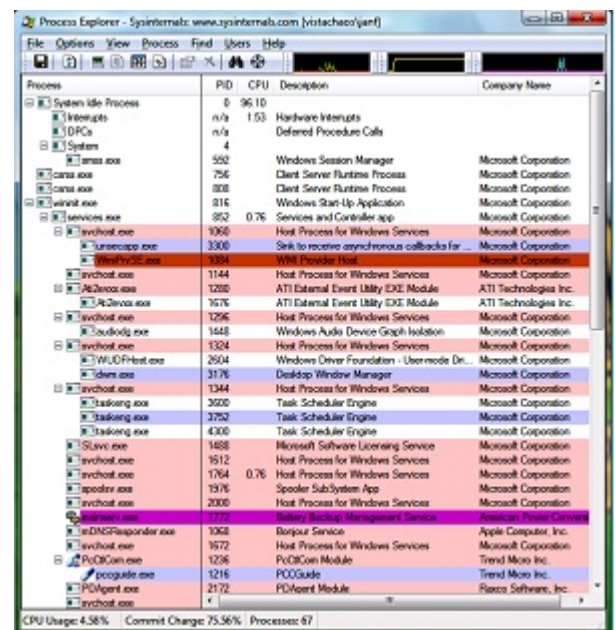
The bad news is really bad. Of the 18 tests in which XP beats Vista, 7 of the differences are vast. In 2D graphics, Vista is slower by 58% to 81%. In fonts tests, Vista is 50% slower. Sequential disk reads are 51% slower in Vista; disk writes are 54% slower.

Hey, I'm not talking about 3D games. All the performance items I'm picking out here are the ones used by office suites, Web browsers and e-mail. One of the trade journals I read tested Vista against XP and concluded, "unless it's imperative that users have an OS with a more exciting look and feel, XP will offer better performance than Vista."

Performance tweaking will be a topic of interest for months to come in Vista. To find out where resources are going, go to <http://www.microsoft.com/technet/sysinternals/default.mspx> and grab the Sysinternals utilities. Microsoft has acquired Sysinternals from Mark Russinovich and Bryce Cogswell and made their utilities available for download. Some are pretty techie, but I point to Process Explorer as particularly useful. (See Figure 1) the Utility runs on both Vista and XP.

Process Explorer gives you information in Windows which rivals Linux utilities. It tells you what program is using a process and much more information in the display. As with any good utility, it is capable of displaying more than you need.

BTW, on the Sysinternals home page, look at the menus on the left and find the item for "Utilities Index." Follow that link, and you will find a place to download the entire Sysinternals suite in a single .ZIP file. Unzip it into an empty directory. There is no need to install anything; just double-click and run.



'Nuff for now.

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Info, Info Everywhere, and Not a Thought to Think

by Vinny La Bash, a member of the Sarasota PCUG, Florida

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Many people think that the internet is the greatest thing since sliced whatchamacallit or the worst abomination that's ever been inflicted upon the human race. As usual the truth lies somewhere in-between. There is no doubt that the internet is a great source of seemingly limitless information, and the information found there tends to fall into three general categories:

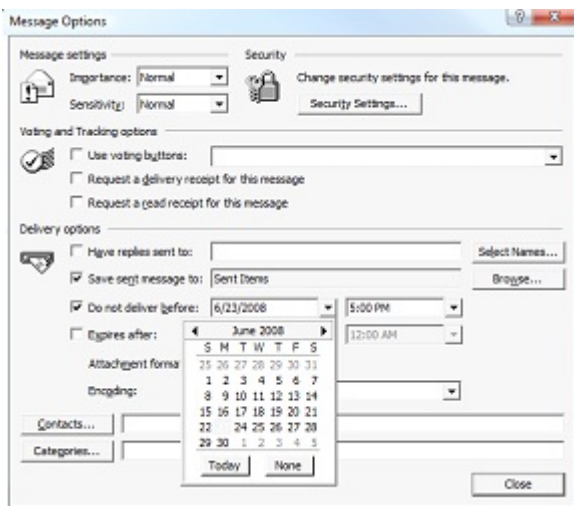
1. Information which is totally useless. Did you know that the average cloud weighs 300,000 pounds? Neither did I, but that's the sort of thing you are most likely to get on the internet unless you are careful.
2. Information which is useful, but not at the moment. I invariably discover a great tax deduction I didn't know about on April 16th. It's too late for this year, and I will probably either forget about it next year or misfile the thing where I can't find it.
3. Information which is useful now. This is extraordinarily rare, comparable to finding eyebrows on eggs, but we all get lucky occasionally.



The data you find in the first category is not only safe to ignore, it's essential to your sanity to ignore it. The third category usually takes care of itself. Simply use it for whatever purpose you have in mind and you're done. The second category is the one that requires a good degree of sound management to avoid wasting time, and that is the problem.

World wide productivity could double overnight if the internet would only send us the information we need at the right time. We spend too much time refining our Google searches, investigating blogs, experimenting with RSS feeds or mucking around our own data bases. One piece of missing information has the potential to make the best presentation look like the product of a misinformed dolt.

Is having the information you need when you need it nothing more than a World Wide Web fantasy? Perhaps not. Did you know that you can set a reminder email for future delivery in Outlook? Here's how to do it:



1. Open Outlook (obviously).
2. Select the email to forward.
3. Click on the Forward button.
4. Click on the Options... button.
5. Put a check in the Do not deliver before box.
6. Select the date of delivery.
7. Click Close.

Don't set a delivery date to a point where you are unlikely to have your present computer unless you are in a corporate network where the systems administrator can make the proper adjustments. Even then, be realistic.

Send yourself notes about meetings shortly before you need them. Include information not only about the subject of the meeting, but about the people attending with you. Your colleagues will think you're a certified genius.

All kinds of things can be done with Outlook and its future delivery capabilities. The usual subjects such as birthdays, anniversaries, and recurring meetings suggest themselves. Investors can send themselves reminders that an option they own is about to expire or to watch for that important dividend payment. Almost any kind of regular to-do item lends itself to this task. Get that tax form in the mail by April 15th. Do you really need a reminder for that?

What do you do if you don't have Outlook? Neither Yahoo, Hotmail nor Outlook Express offers this feature, but there is a web site that can help. Go to www.futureme.org and create your email for future delivery. This site is well suited for information you won't need for months if not years. Of course, delivery depends on the web site still being in existence when you need it, and it doesn't handle attachments. If you can live with those limitations, go for it.

People talk a lot about traffic congestion, but unlike the weather, you can do something about it. If you commute regularly to work take a peek at www.traffic.com. The site will send you real-time traffic maps, road condition alerts and jam alerts. This site is great for road warriors or anyone who drives over regular routes.

Do you suffer from springtime allergies? Then take a trip to www.weather.com to have pollen, weather, and other alerts delivered directly to your desktop. Not everything has to be delivered by email.

Cutting down on information overload is the best reason for using these tools. Avoiding data until you need it will free you from the drudgery of sifting through piles of irrelevant information to find the one item you need, and best of all, you won't worry about being unprepared when an unexpected deadline suddenly looms up before you.

Use information efficiently and you will become respected, admired, and the opposite sex will seek you out. When people inevitably accuse you of having a perfect memory, tell them you have a photogenic mind.

For less than a computer how-to book, a yearly user group membership is the best accessory you can buy for your computer.

Exploring Windows Explorer

by Editor, OrangeBytes, North Orange County Computer Club

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Everyone using Windows XP uses Windows Explorer all the time. Some use it in what I consider the true form. Some you use it under the title of My Computer. And all of us when we are using Internet Explorer, because Windows Explorer is an integral part of Internet Explorer. I continue to be surprised at how many people do not know that you can right click on the start button and go directly to Windows Explorer. I prefer that to the My Computer path because it brings up Windows Explorer with the left hand pane of the window displaying the tree structure of the files. It surprises me that many people who use the My Computer path don't know that they can bring up the tree pane by clicking on the folder button in the taskbar.

Something that is almost sad, is how many people live with the default settings of Windows Explorer. One of the first things that I do with a new installation of Windows XP, is to open Windows Explorer, go to the view menu and click on details. The next step is to open the tools menu, and click on folder options. When the folder options window opens, but what had a slump and wrong that a mile and the click on the view tab. Then click on display the full path in the title bar to place a checkmark in the box, click on show hidden files and folders to put the bullet on that line, click on a hide extensions for known file types to remove the checkmark. Personally, I think Microsoft did new users in particular, a major disservice by having the last item set to by default. The resulting confusion of having two or more files with the same name, and not differentiated by the file extension, causes a fair amount of distress in users that are not sure which file to choose. I like to see the protected operating system files but you may be more comfortable leaving them hidden. The last item is to check is show control panel in my computer. Then click on apply, wait for it to finish, then click on apply to all holders, then click on OK and you're done.

As a result of the above actions the right hand window pane will now have four columns, name, size, height, and date modified. The sort will be set to alphabetical by name, numbers and special characters first, then A to Z. If you want the sort to be Z to A, click on name at the top of the name column. If you want the sort to be by size, click on size at the top of the size column and Windows Explorer will sort the folder by file size, smallest file first. To reverse the order, and place the largest file at the top of the list, click on size again. The same procedure works with the type column and the date modified column. There is a faint divider bar between each of the columns located in the horizontal bar where the names of the columns are located. One of the easiest ones to find is one

space to the right of the column heading Size. If you move the mouse cursor to that area you should see a double headed arrow appear. If you then click and hold the left mouse button, you can adjust the width of the edge of the columns. The width of the name column is often too narrow to show the complete file name. Having the complete path displayed in the address bar, is often useful when you need to copy and paste that path into other applications.

When you have a lot of files in a folder, there is a navigation shortcut in the name column that too few people seem to know about. When you first open a folder, the display will show any other folders (or what should really be called subdirectories) within that folder followed by files, starting with the letter A. If you need to get to a file that starts with a letter T, you might have to scroll through several hundred files to get there. There is a faster way. Click on the first file in the folder to highlight it, then type the first letter of the file that you wish to find. In this example the display would immediately jump to the first file that starts with the letter T. If you know what you are searching for, and can type quickly, you can follow the first letter with the second letter of the name and it will take you to that point instead.

I think initially setting all folders on a hard disk to the detail view is the best starting point and is best suited for the majority of folders. Windows XP allows you to customize the view of each and every folder and will remember what settings you assigned to a given folder. For instance, for folders that contain photos it is often more useful if the thumbnail view, or the film strip view, is chosen so that you can see what each picture actually is. The advantage of the thumbnail view is that you can find images quicker than in the filmstrip view. The advantage of the filmstrip view is that you get a line of thumbnails across the bottom of the pane and a larger view of which ever thumbnail is highlighted. There are also mouse click arrow's that allow you to view the next or previous image. Don't forget that you can right click on any of the thumbnails and bring up a whole new menu of things that you can do with the image.

Everybody should learn how to do file housekeeping on their computer disk. Being able to move files from one folder to another, to copy files from one folder to another, to create new folders, and several other functions along those lines can help you keep your data organized. It should be noted that most of these functions can be accomplished in more than one fashion. For instance, if you wished to copy a file from folder A to folder B, you would first select the file by left clicking on it which will cause it to be highlighted. You could then open the edit menu by clicking on edit, then click on copy, then click on the destination folder, then click on paste in the edit menu, a copy of the file will appear in that folder. Alternately, you could use some of the keyboard shortcuts. You could highlight the file, press and hold down the Ctrl key and then tap the C. key. This will copy the file to the temporary holding bin called clipboard. You would then highlight the destination folder, press and hold down the control key, then tap the V. key which will paste the file from the clipboard to the folder you highlighted. Another method is called drag and drop. In this method you move the mouse cursor over the file you wish to copy, left click and hold the mouse button, move the mouse to drag a ghost image of the file over the top of the destination folder and then release the left mouse button. There are many more features to cover but this is all the room I have for now. We will do more later.

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USB

External USB hubs are either self-powered (obtain power from an AC/electrical outlet) or bus-powered (obtain power from the USB port on the PC that it's plugged into). Bus-powered hubs can only handle low-power USB devices that use 100mA (milliamps) or less, such as mice, keyboards, joysticks, or USB devices that are self-powered (use an AC power connector). They can't handle devices that require 100 to 500mA of power, such as video cameras, scanners, and external drives. If the device is a high-power device, attach it to a USB port on the PC or purchase and install a self-powered hub. Or you can try distributing high-power and bus-powered USB devices across your PC's USB ports, so that not all high-power devices are on the same external hub.

Blocked Attachment

Several things may cause an attachment to be blocked. If the sender attempts to resend a previously blocked message without the attachment, and it gets through fine, the difficulty might be that Outlook Express is blocking the attachment. To get it through, go to Tools in the OE menu bar and select Options. In the Options window, select the Security tab and uncheck the option for Do Not Allow Attachments To Be Saved Or Opened That Could Potentially Be A Virus and click OK. Before doing this, make sure that virus protection is in place, however. After you receive the attachment, change your settings back to ensure no unwelcome attachments make it through. In a workplace, changing attachment security settings is not possible because Microsoft administrators consider some file types to be too dangerous to let onto a system. These might include file extensions such as .EXE, .CMD, and .MSP.

Wireless Networking

Wireless connections can be tricky. Sometimes they can work over relatively long distances but fail across the room. If your clients are within signal range of your router, begin by looking for other electronic devices that can generate electronic interference. Microwaves are frequent culprits; others are additional wireless units, such as wireless speakers, Bluetooth devices, and cordless phones. Even wireless mice, garage door remotes, and brick walls have been known to cause problems. In short, overlook nothing and test everything if your wireless LAN experiences periodic performance drops. Found the problem? Just because interference is present, that doesn't mean it's omnipresent. Try moving your router. Raise it several feet, or put it in an area away from other electronic gear. Even a difference of a few inches may make the difference between a good, solid connection and a poor, spotty one. Or lacking that, try moving your wireless clients away from interference causing devices.

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The Santa Clarita Valley PC Group is dedicated to supporting the needs of its members and to the exchange of information about computers, peripherals, services, hardware and software through meetings, special interest groups, web page, and the distribution of this newsletter.

The SCV PC Group is a proud member of the
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